

Echoes of Religious Thought.

BY W. K. AZBILL.

Shinto a Hindrance to Progress in Japan.

The word *Shinto* means "the way of the gods." In Japan deified ancestors are the gods alluded to in this word. Chief of these are the Emperors, from Jima Yeno down, (possibly one should say up) to the reigning Mikado, who is undoubtedly the greatest of all Japan's monarchs, if they are to be arranged in a scale of enlightened reigns. For, during *Meiji*, which means enlightened reign, Japan has made more progress than in all the two thousand and five hundred years preceeding. The relation between the present Emperor and the people is more intimate and real than ever before; the sense of loyalty and affection of the people has never been surpassed; yet, there is less of mystery about His majesty, and he appears more in the role of an ordinary mortal than any of his predecessors. However, he is in a sense worshipped by almost all, and by many with a religious veneration that approaches very nearly to the western notion of worship.

Of course, educated Japanese while entertaining the profoundest respect and affection for their Emperor, look upon the religious homage of the masses as mistaken and childish. Yet, most of the leaders of public opinion think, or seem to think, that this notion and its accompanying sentiment almost universal with the common people, is necessary to preserve loyalty and to insure obedience. Hence we have the amazing spectacle of heads of departments in Government, enlightened members of Parliament, and Professors in the Imperial University and other great schools, setting themselves in the way of the natural rights of teachers and liberties of the people in the formation and conduct of schools where the hand of desuetude might touch this idolatry.

That they are ashamed of their attitude towards freedom of speech on this matter in the schools and elsewhere, is evinced by the veiling phrases, "the nationality of Japan," and "our national spirit," and the like. The picture of the Emperor is placed in a conspicuous place in the schools conducted under Government direction, and all teachers and pupils are expected on entering the buildings to bow to these pictures. The enlightened deny that this is worship, that it is obligatory. But the teacher or the child who refuses finds a hard road to travel. He is said to set himself in opposition to the "national spirit," and to be opposed to "the nationality of Japan."

The true explanation of the use of these phrases is, that the ignorant cannot understand how Chris-

tian Japanese can refuse to worship the Emperor, worship another "Son of Heaven," and at the same time be loyal to the Mikado and his Empire. This Shinto stands in the way of progress and of Christianity in Japan.

Prof. Hyslop and Spiritism.

Prof. James Hyslop, of Columbia University, a member of the Society for Physical Research, gives some of the results of investigations which have extended over a period of thirteen years in which he says: "The amazing number of specific incidents that can be proved to have been the experiences, thoughts, and actions of the alleged communication and of him alone, in connection with the sitter, is so overwhelming in its character that no student can refuse it the merit of following, in its external features at least, the demands of scientific proof of immortality."

Prof. Hyslop's investigations have been made in connection with Mr. Piper, of Boston. He says that in reaching his conclusions five hypotheses have been considered, namely, fraud, illusion, suggestion, telepathy, and spiritism. After repeated experiments and observation under conditions which put conscious and even unconscious fraud out of court, he was obliged also to give up the alternative hypotheses of illusion and suggestion, so that, he was limited to the alternative of telepathy or the influence of disembodied souls. Of these he prefers the latter.

His pronouncement against the frauds of spirits in general are sweeping and most vigorous. Of the spiritists of New York City he says: "They represent nothing but a kind of trash for which there is no adequate language in the court of contempt to describe its character. His argument in favor of spirit communications against the hypothesis of telepathy is so thoughtful and reasonable as to commend itself to the judgment of the scientific world. The following paragraph will be read with interest:

"Telepathy must assume the medium's power in the trance to hunt up someone in the world unknown to her, and select the right facts from his memory to represent the personal identity of alleged communicator. It is even true that instances occur in which such facts are, or would have to be, ascertained from persons actually unknown to the Sitter. Further, unknown communicators, that is, unknown to the Sitter, present specific incidents to be sent to friends,

and allusions to the recent deaths of specific persons are often made when the Sitters know nothing of it. Telepathy, to account for such acquisition by Mr. Piper's brain, must practically ascribe to it the capacity of our increase."

So, he rejects telepathy as the true hypothesis and accounts for Mr. Piper's communications on the theory of spirit influences. When it was suggested to him that the communications might be Satanic, he replied that it is not a question as to the kind of spirits, but whether there are any at all. However, he thinks that abundant evidence is furnished of the personal identity of discarnate persons.

"Sheldonism."

The *Literary Digest* quotes at length a writer in the *London Church Review* who criticises Charles M. Sheldon's books, calling their admirers a new cult and the teaching "Sheldonism." The editor of the *Digest* makes neither favorable nor adverse comments.

The evolution of Mr. Sheldon's idea is within the memory of thousands. 'Endeavor Clark' wrote the pledge for his young people some eighteen years ago: "Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, for strength, I promise him that I will do *whatever he would like to have me do*," &c. Mr. William Stead, in his book, "If Christ Should Come to Chicago," written about the time of the World's Fair, contained the suggestion that every follower of Christ should be a Christ in human society, which meant, of course, that each should try to act always as Jesus would probably have acted in the same circumstances. Mr. Sheldon's book, "In His Steps," illustrates, from the author's point of view, how such a course would effect the lives of people and the business of the world.

Were Jesus Christ living and preaching in any part of the civilized world to-day as he lived and preached in Palestine eighteen hundred sixty-five years ago, he would be pronounced by the whole newspaper fraternity as the greatest crank of modern times, and his religion would be denounced as utterly impracticable. No wonder, then, that Mr. Sheldon's suggestion as to how we might "follow in his steps," is met by such adverse criticisms as those of the *London Church Review*.

When one wrongs another he is apt to begin thence forward to hate the object of his wrong deed.

If one will do good to another he will thenceforward find it easier to love the recipient of his good deed.

The impulses of a good heart enliven and beautify the loveliest features, and a bad disposition makes ugly wrinkles on the handsomest of faces.

A most appropriate feature of flag raising day would be another proclamation by President McKinley. Appropriate subjects for such a document are so numerous that it would be hard to suggest the most important topic. Leave that with the President.—*Bulletin*.

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The oldest tree on earth with an authenticated history is the great bhoon tree of Burmah. For twenty centuries it has been held sacred to Buddha, and no person is allowed to touch the trunk. When the leaves fall they are carried away as relics by pilgrims.

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The chief motive of the gossip is not always to do harm, but often to gratify the thirst of his listener for news. There are times when the listener is known to enjoy ill news of his enemies. This furnishes a delightful opportunity and pleasing pastime for the gossip.

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A Clerical Witticism.—Dr. Lyman Abbott tells this anecdote of the Miles banquet: A punch was served showing tiny flags stuck in the ice at each side—the English and American flags. The prominent English guest of the occasion was replying to a toast to the two countries and looking at the punch with the American flag in one end and the English flag in the other, he said there seemed to be a coldness existing between the two countries. Dr. van Dyke followed and, looking at the punch and referring to what the other speaker had said, stated that no matter what coldness there might be the countries seemed to be united by a common spirit.

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